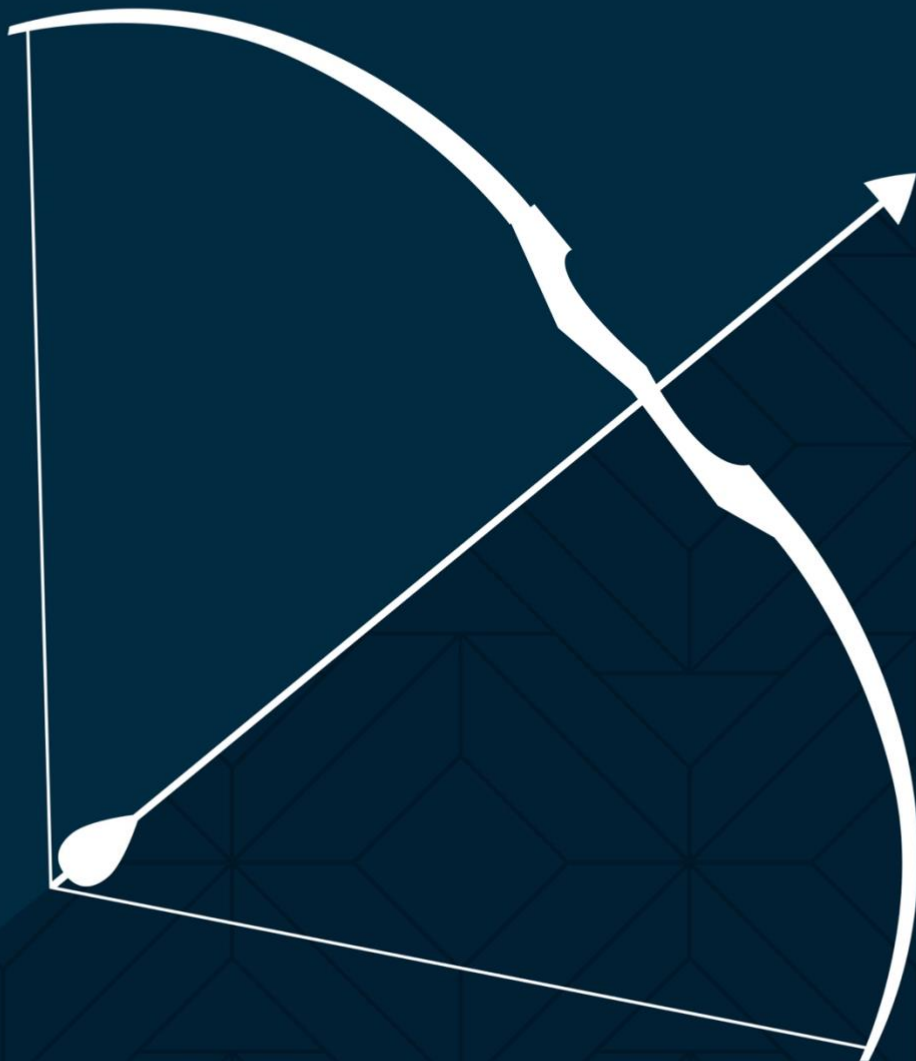


# THE BOW STRINGS OF SPIRIT-FILLED PREACHING

BY GENE RONCONE



AN EXPOSITION OF COLOSSIANS 1:24-29 AND ITS APPLICATION TO CONTEMPORARY PREACHING AS A TRIBUTE  
TO CHARLES T. CRABTREE AND RESOURCE FOR THE CRABTREE SCHOOL OF PASTORAL MINISTRY.

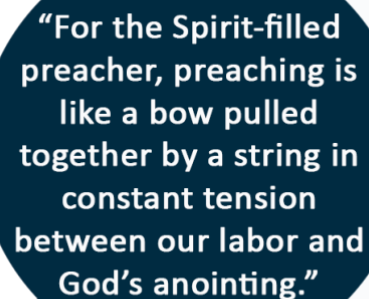
# The Bowstrings of Spirit-Filled Preaching

By Gene Roncone

When it comes to preaching, finding a balance between a strong work ethic and a deep dependence upon the Spirit can be difficult. In this intersection between the divine and the human, when does our toil cease to be spiritual and become vain exploits in self-sufficiency? Can a preacher be passionate about the labor of preaching and still be powerfully anointed? How can we resolve the tension between our labor and God's anointing?

The Apostle Paul speaks to this in Colossians 1:24-29 while addressing his own preaching ministry. Paul's phrase, *the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness* (v.25), is clearly a reference to his oral proclamation of the Word. However, Paul's mention of the end to which he *strenuously contends with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in him* (v.29) is referring to what we as Spirit-filled believers call "the anointing." It is here that Paul introduces us to the challenge of forging a balance between human effort and divine enablement in our preaching.

*<sup>24</sup>Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. <sup>25</sup>I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness—<sup>26</sup>the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. <sup>27</sup>To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. <sup>28</sup>He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. <sup>29</sup>To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me (Colossians 1:24-29 NIV).*



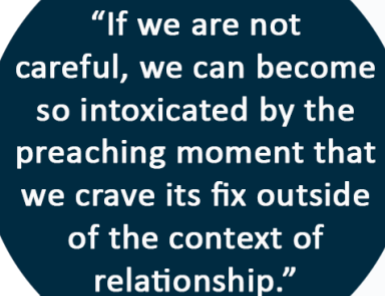
**"For the Spirit-filled preacher, preaching is like a bow pulled together by a string in constant tension between our labor and God's anointing."**

For the Spirit-filled preacher, preaching is like a bow pulled together by a string in constant tension between our labor and God's anointing. Any archer will tell you that a good bowstring is made up of several nylon strands that create tension and make the bow work. Paul's description of his preaching ministry shows us that there are multiple strands that must be kept in tension to make the bow of preaching effective. These five dimensions of preaching that Paul modeled were compassion, calling, balance, labor, and anointing. My father-in-law and mentor, Charles T. Crabtree, modeled these qualities with profound authenticity. I will share those experiences to illustrate these biblical truths throughout this paper.

## Compassion

Because preaching is a public occurrence, it can easily become divorced from the realm of human connection. If we are not careful, we can even become so intoxicated by the preaching moment that we begin to crave its fix outside of the context of relationship. This results in preaching junkies who develop an unhealthy addiction to the crowd while being aloof and indifferent to the individual. To love to preach is one thing; to love the people we preach to is quite another. Make no mistake about it, great preaching springs from compassion and empathy for people. Paul makes this point perfectly clear: *Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church (v.24).*

Paul's love for people gave him a willingness to suffer for others while ministering to them. He took joy in what his suffering accomplished—both in and for the body of Christ. At first glance, it may appear that Paul is implying that Christ's sacrifice on the cross is somehow incomplete or insufficient. However, the word that Paul used for "afflictions" (v.24) was not commonly used in the New Testament to describe Christ's suffering. It was most often used to describe the hardships of those who proclaim and preach the gospel.



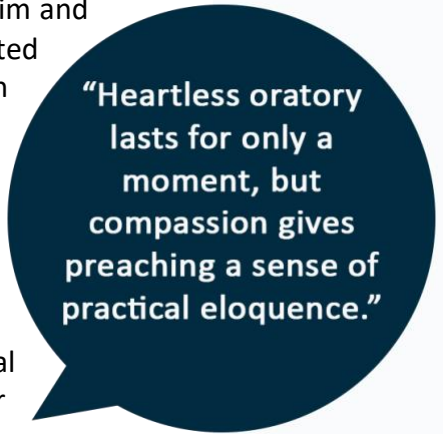
**"If we are not careful, we can become so intoxicated by the preaching moment that we crave its fix outside of the context of relationship."**

Paul was not reticent to talk about the hardships and persecution he faced as a preacher. He listed many of them in 2 Corinthians 11 which included being constantly on the move, beaten with rods, whipped, imprisoned, and shipwrecked while on his ministry journey. Maybe you can relate to similar sufferings because of your own call to preach.

Our problem starts when our lack of love for people brings us to resent or avoid the challenges of preaching. Paul's love for people enabled him to see the big picture of the kingdom and face ministry challenges with eagerness and anticipation. Like Paul, our love for people should drive us to be better preachers, to make significant sacrifices, and to willingly accept any negative consequences because of our commitment to the Word of God.

During my service in District ministry I was asked to sit in on a meeting with a pastor whose church seemed to take every opportunity to reject his vision and leadership. The church was riddled with conflict, and we were now in a private meeting trying to salvage his ministry. This pastor resented that the people wanted him to be more relational. "I am not a 'let's sit down and have some pie' kind of pastor. God has called me to preach," he declared to me and the then-district superintendent. Our Superintendent understood that compassion could not be dismissed on the wings of temperament or gifting. He sent the young leader several gift certificates for free pie at a local bakery. His preaching, while good oratory, was not interesting to them because he was not interested in them.

Charles Crabtree ministered with this kind of compassion. While pastoring a large church in San Jose, California, Dad's secretary buzzed him and said a distraught woman had stopped by the office and wanted to speak with him. Her name was Lisa and she looked to be in her mid-forties; but to Dad's surprise, she was only 17 years old. At the age of 14, she rebelled against her parents and ran away from home. She had become a heroin addict and a prostitute, selling her body to support her addiction. Dad led her to Christ, convinced her to call her parents right then, and brokered an unforgettable reunion. At this point in Dad's ministry, he had a large staff and a team of professional counselors working out of the church; but he did not refer her to one of his associates or to the onsite counseling service. Despite having an already full schedule, he decided to follow his compassion. Charles Crabtree preached powerfully to crowds of thousands because he cared for the crowd of one.



**"Heartless oratory lasts for only a moment, but compassion gives preaching a sense of practical eloquence."**

Ironically, Paul's description of his own preaching ministry started with a private heart of compassion. Heartless oratory lasts for only a moment, but compassion gives preaching a sense of practical eloquence. Make no mistake about it—powerful and anointed preaching begins with a pastor's heart.

## Calling

Throughout the Epistles, there was one great awareness in Paul's life which served as a powerful lens through which he viewed the world: his call to preach! Some pastors mistakenly think that just because they like to preach, they have a call to preach. That reminds me of a man who made an appointment to talk with me about the call to ministry. As he sat in front of my desk, he leaned forward and said with great curiosity, "Pastor, I can't stand to listen to anyone preach. You reckon that means God is calling me to be a preacher?" What made Paul's call to preach such a defining compass in his ministry?

Paul spoke of preaching as a divine calling that he had been given as a trustee for safekeeping: *I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness* (Colossians 1:25 NIV). Isaiah experienced the same calling to preach when he said that God touched his mouth with a burning coal (6:5-7). Jeremiah felt destined to preach: *The LORD put out his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth"* (1:9 ESV). Ezekiel claimed God anointed him to preach: *The Spirit entered into me and set me upon my feet* (2:1-2). Jesus said: *The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor* (Luke 4:18 NIV).

Paul also understood his call to preach as a revelatory mandate. He confessed saying, <sup>25</sup>*I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness—<sup>26</sup>the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. <sup>27</sup>To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory* (Colossians 1:25-27 NIV). Paul saw his role as one who enlightened people to the full council of truth. He understood the prophetic role and urgency of preaching. He shows us this when he says the gospel was *kept hidden* (v.26). In the original language, a new sentence is launched with the words *but is now* (v.26). Paul speaks of God's truth being unknown in the past and then changes from past tense to present tense with the words, *but is now*. This reveals to us that Paul understood preaching to be "the now" or the present tense of the gospel. God's truth is unknown to many, BUT NOW He is breaking the silence through the ministry of preaching.

**"There was one great awareness in Paul's life which served as a powerful lens through which he viewed the world: his call to preach!"**

Paul saw the oral proclamation of the Word as front and center in his calling. In his mind, preaching was not one of the many duties of ministry but the prime directive of which he felt called, commissioned, and destined! If Paul were alive today, he would be hard pressed to describe himself by our common pastoral designations. In Paul's mind, he was a preacher and proclaimer of the mystery revealed! When he thought of himself, the only word that could satisfy his calling was the word "preacher." In our day of micro-specific lanes, fashionable titles, and laser-targeted ministry focus, it would do us well to have more men and women whose divine calling could be best described by the word "preacher."

Dad Crabtree had this same understanding of his own calling. I asked his daughters how they thought their dad defined himself. "I don't think there is any doubt that Dad saw himself as a preacher to his bone marrow. While it was his calling, he still had to fight for it, protect it, nurture it, and cultivate it. Although he had other interests and strengths, he never allowed anything else to distract him from preaching," said Renee. Rachel recalled this as well saying, "I never heard Dad waiver or doubt that he was called to preach. He devoted his entire life to it and was willing to move away from family and places of comfort to do what God had called him to do—to preach the Word." Rhonda said, "If Dad had to choose only one title to describe himself as a minister, he would have proudly picked the word 'preacher.'"

**"In our day of micro-specific lanes, fashionable titles, and laser-targeted ministry focus, it would do us well to have more men and women whose divine calling to serve the church could only be described by the word preacher."**

May I say gently to you today that we need more people who feel that heaven has dropped upon their shoulders an indestructible, undeniable, and unavoidable call to preach the Word!



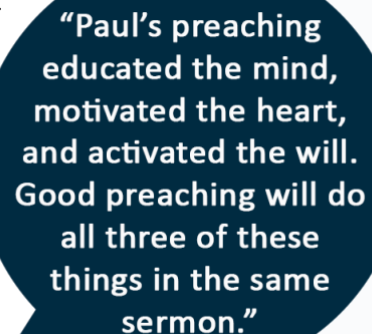
## Balance

We live in a time where the only success that is celebrated seems to be that on the edge of extremes. However, look at the tremendous balance that Paul's preaching embraced. His description of preaching seems to employ a three-pronged approach to delivery: *He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ* (Colossians 1:28 NIV). Paul's preaching was balanced in three ways:

- First, Spirit-filled preaching educates the mind as Paul said his preaching involved *teaching...with all wisdom*.
- Second, Spirit-filled preaching motivates the heart as Paul said he *proclaimed* or broadcast a message that targeted the hearts of his listeners.
- Third, Spirit-filled preaching activates the will. Paul said he *admonished* his hearers. The word means to plead, warn, and press for decisive action.

Paul's preaching seemed to educate the mind, motivated the heart, and activated the will. Good preaching will do all three of these things in the same sermon.

Spirit-filled preaching is not only balanced but is also employed as a discipleship method. Notice the goal of Paul's preaching. He said he proclaims, admonishes, and teaches towards a specific end. That end is Christian maturity and discipleship. That is what Paul meant by the phrase, *that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ* (Colossians 1:28 NIV). As Spirit-filled preachers, we need to expand the standards we use to evaluate effective preaching. Heartwarming receptions and emotional manifestations are key indicators that people are being touched by God's Word. However, we must remember that the real test of preaching is whether people are discipled and brought to maturity BECAUSE of our sermons—not IN SPITE OF them.



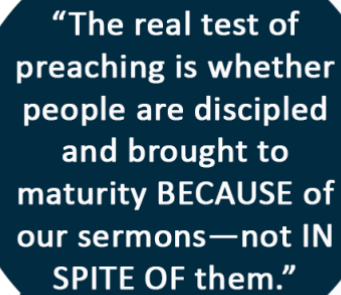
**"Paul's preaching educated the mind, motivated the heart, and activated the will. Good preaching will do all three of these things in the same sermon."**

Paul shows us that Spirit-filled preaching has another element of balance. It is widely inclusive and targets people of all ages, ethnicities, and genders: *We proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ* (Colossians 1:28 NIV). Notice how often Paul used the word "everyone" in this passage. The NIV uses the word two times, but the original Greek employed a form of the word "everyone" three times. Something important is happening here that we would do well to ponder. Not only must our preaching be balanced in its nature and focus, but it must also be balanced in its appeal. The glory of our message lies not in its focus on a few but in its inclusiveness of everyone.

I saw this kind of balance modeled in Charles Crabtree's preaching ministry as well. When reflecting upon her father's preaching, his daughter Rhonda said: "Dad was not into extremes, fads, politics, news trends, or generational targeting. His preaching was balanced because he was convinced that the Word of God must be applicable to every age, race, and gender." His

daughter Renee noticed that this quality manifested itself in those who responded to his altar calls: “If you looked closely at who responded to Dad’s altar calls, you could find first-time visitors, teenagers, drug addicts off of the street, professional people, and even longtime church attenders.”

This is something from our heritage that the Spirit-filled community must rediscover. The glory of our legacy as a Pentecostal people is our diversity of appeal. In a day of micromarketing and exclusive tribalism, we would do well to remember that Spirit-filled preaching reaches all ages, generations, genders, and ethnicities.



“The real test of preaching is whether people are disciplined and brought to maturity **BECAUSE** of our sermons—not **IN SPITE** OF them.”

## Labor

We will look at the part God plays in the preaching process; however, I find it interesting that Paul chooses to address the demands of his own participation before mentioning God’s part in preaching. To emphasize his own contribution to the preaching process, Paul piggybacked two powerful words—“strenuously” and “contend”—when he said, *To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me* (Colossians 1:29 NIV).

Verse 29 is like a sinkhole that, upon further investigation, turns out to be an underground cavern with open rooms and endless opportunities for discovery. The more I study the relationship between our labor and God’s anointing, the more I am drawn to a deeper dependence upon the Holy Spirit in my preaching. The truth of this verse flies in the face of some of our traditional but mistaken beliefs about the relationship between hard work and supernatural anointing. This passage cannot be interpreted in its correct context without coming to the conclusion that we cannot have an effective preaching ministry without hard work!

A closer look at the original meanings of these two words reveals the following:


- **Labor** (kopiao): To give oneself to the point of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion. Paul claimed he labored in his proclaiming, admonishing, and teaching of the Word of God; but that was not all. He took it one step further and implied that this labor was not something that came easily but was a challenge and a struggle.
- **Struggle** (agonizomai): To actively contend with obstacles, difficulties, and limitations. It is the same word that was used of athletes in Paul’s day who were engaged in competitive wrestling. We get our word “agonize” from this same word. It is an active, continual, and unpleasant wrestling to achieve a goal. The image it paints is one of sweaty wrestlers, exhausted and wearied, but still alert and striving because the match is not over.

I once spoke to a sports psychiatrist who helped me understand the agony athletes experience. “The wall” is a term used to describe something that happens to many marathon runners when they have depleted the muscles’ storage of glycogen. Glycogen, or sugar, is the muscles’ primary

fuel and is stored in the muscular tissue and liver. When the body has run out of fuel in the muscles, it switches over to the fat reserves as a fuel source. Although this transition does not take long, it is unpleasant and often causes a burning sensation. The body begins this process by sending uncomfortable warning signs to protect itself. A runner involved in this struggle will experience weakness, muscular pain, and a strong emotional urge to quit. “Pushing through the wall” is what separates the winners from the losers. This athletic state is how Paul chose to describe his own “struggling with all God’s energy.”

Paul was putting all his energy and strength to the end of presenting people mature through the ministry of preaching. When I seek to apply Paul’s portrait of labor to a modern context the following four applications come to mind.

All preachers face the labor of priority. Fighting the dragon of compulsive business, constant availability, and distractions requires us to fortify the priority of preaching. We must structure our teams and days in a way that makes us available for the labor of preaching and willing to embrace the struggle. This priority will also require us to create a culture within our church that values biblical preaching and the time it will require. We must be willing to say “no” to the image of the perfect and omnipresent CEO or rock star celebrity and say “yes” to the mantle of proclaimer.



**“We cannot have  
an effective,  
biblically-based, and  
Spirit-anointed  
preaching ministry  
without hard work!”**

We must not forget the labor of preparation as well. Anointed preaching is empowered by the truth of God’s Word much more than the magnetism of our personality. Our labor is one of wrestling with the text in context and identifying the truths that transcend time and culture and set people free. In a day when pastoring has become synonymous with pathological business, we must be strategic in carving out quiet time to hear God’s voice and let the Word live in us before we proclaim it. If Sunday comes and finds us unprepared for what could have been our finest hour, it is no one’s fault but our own for in all of life we are the product of our own priorities.

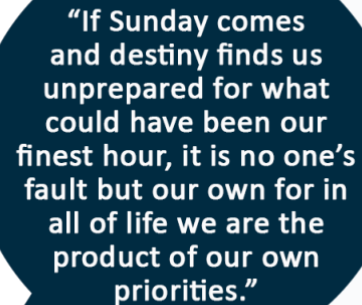
Charles Crabtree’s daughters often recall their father’s deep devotion to the labor of preaching. Rachel once told me, “Dad spent hours preparing for his messages and wrote out every sermon word-for-word by hand. I remember sitting in his office one Sunday evening as he was preaching in the auditorium. I found his notes on his desk and realized that he was quoting much of the sermon from memory.” His daughter Rhonda reflects saying, “Dad guarded his study time by getting away and spending an entire day in preparation while writing out his manuscript word-for-word. Back in the day when phones had cords, he would take the phone, put it in a kitchen drawer, and close it to avoid any possible distraction.” Perhaps Renee summed it up best saying, “Even as kids, we knew that only a life-altering emergency would interfere with his study days. His study habits were legendary, but so were his sermons.”

The application of truth is another task worthy of our labor. Paul said he proclaimed, admonished, and taught with *all wisdom* (v.28). His preaching did not hang on useless facts, impractical



exegesis, or intellectual sugar candy. No, he worked hard to deliver truth on the wings of practical and relevant application. He labored first to understand the scriptures and then labored again to apply them. Paul was like the ancient preachers that Peter spoke of who *searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing* (1 Peter 1:10-11 NIV).

However, the greatest and most important part of our labor is listening to God and hearing the scriptures. It is in those hours of reflective solitude that we cry out like David saying, *Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law* (Psalm 119:18 NIV). It is when the sermon is first preached to us by the Holy Spirit that we can say with the apostles, *Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?* (Luke 24:32 NIV). It is when our spirit and not our mouths are open that the Counselor, whom the father sent, teaches us all things and reminds us of everything Jesus taught (John 14:26). It is when we step away from our codependent reliance on books and borrowed sermons that we, like Jeremiah, can stand *in the council of the LORD to see or to hear his word* (23:18 NIV). It is when we the great talkers are at a loss for words and have nothing to say, when our need to hear is more urgent than our need to be heard, when we as Spirit-filled believers cry out for God's Word to fall like rain, and when we in quiet labor plead, "WORD OF GOD, SPEAK!"



"If Sunday comes and destiny finds us unprepared for what could have been our finest hour, it is no one's fault but our own for in all of life we are the product of our own priorities."

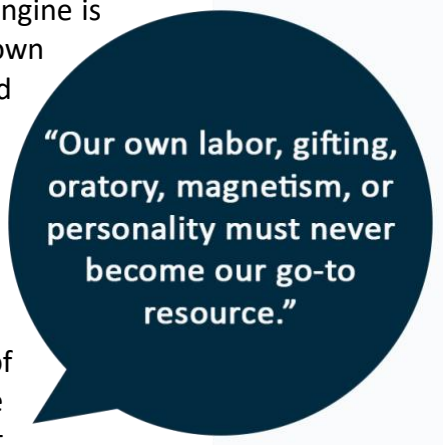
Charles' oldest daughter, Renee, described the burden her father carried: "Although it sounds like a heavy burden to the preacher, it is actually a genuine freedom."

## Anointing

I mentioned previously a good bowstring is made up of several nylon strands, but there is one string I have yet to mention. It is wrapped around the other strands like a belt at the center of the strings and is called the "serving." The serving is the connecting point where the arrow meets the string. It is where the strength and tension of the strings are transferred to the arrow. Paul now brings our attention to this last and most important contributor to Spirit-filled preaching. We see it when Paul says, *To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me* (Colossians 1:29 NIV). Paul shows us that God's anointing upon the preacher is what brings total balance and makes the arrow hit the target. But where and when does that occur?

God's anointing is found at the end of ourselves. Notice that the anointing did not relieve Paul of the need to labor and struggle. He still gave himself mentally, physically, and spiritually to his preaching. He still found this process to be an agonizing struggle that did not come easily and demanded dedication and focused priorities. However, Paul shows us that God's mighty power was released at the end of himself and in partnership with God's power.

God's anointing in the preaching moment is much like a turbo engine. The turbo forces air into the engine which allows it to burn more fuel and create increased force. Although the turbo is always in operation, you do not feel its full impact until the engine is functioning at high capacity. If two cars were driving through town side by side, one with a turbo and the other without, you would not notice much of a difference in their speed and power. However, if they were both on the open highway at equal speed and pressed the accelerator with equal pressure, the car with the turbo would experience greater power and pull away. The anointing of God is the same way. When we bring our own labor and diligence to the task of preaching, God's mighty power energizes us with a supernatural endowment of energy and anointing. Consequently, if the question were asked, "Where is God powerfully at work in Paul?" the text would answer, "Wherever Paul labored so energetically."



**"Our own labor, gifting, oratory, magnetism, or personality must never become our go-to resource."**

However, the anointing is also found at the place of spiritual dependency. The word "working" that Paul used to describe God's energy operational within him is used in the middle voice rather than the passive voice. In other words, God is the implied worker doing supernatural work, not Paul. This is where so many of us unknowingly disconnect from our greatest source of power. Our own labor, gifting, oratory, magnetism, or personality must never become our go-to resource. It is only when, despite our labor, we feel bankrupt without God's anointing and desperate for His power. Ramona Crabtree, Charles' wife of 60 years, recalls his seeking the anointing early in their ministry. When I asked her what priorities he had in that pursuit, she named five:

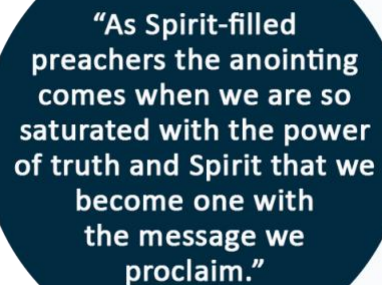
- An active prayer life.
- A sensitivity to the holy spirit.
- A commitment to obey the Word at all costs.
- A love to listen to and study great preaching.
- A passion to develop his own content as directed by the Holy Spirit.

However, Dad Crabtree showed me another great truth that Paul implies. God's anointing is ignited at the point in time when we become the message we preach. As Pentecostals, we talk so much about the anointing that it is easy to mistake its fruit for the plant itself. Reading that last statement, you may have different memories or experiences in your mind as of what the anointing means and is to you. However, Paul says the anointing or *the energy Christ so powerfully works* (v.29) is functioning WITHIN him. In other words, before the anointing changes the lives of the hearers, it roams around and transforms the life of the preacher.

The anointing of God is not some aura floating about my head like in the old paintings of sacred saints. Nor is it a lucky rabbit's foot that we pull out of our pocket and squeeze after having neglected the labor of preaching all week. Paul shows us it is certainly not something that happens during the preaching moment and then evaporates after the sermon. Contrary to our

Pentecostal mythology, it is not some euphoria that makes me talk faster, more fluently, or with a more authoritative tone. Please hear what I am not saying. I am not saying that these things do not happen when a person is anointed; however, I am saying that they are no more the essence of the anointing than the chills are the essence of a fever. The anointing is God's mighty work "within" me. It is the power of God being allowed to walk freely through the corridors of my heart and spirit because I have lived with the truth of God's Word and now the truth of God's Word is burning in me.

It is much easier to proclaim the message than it is to become the message. That is what the anointing is as Spirit-filled preachers. It is our being so saturated with the power of truth and Spirit that we are one with the message we proclaim. It is at that unforgettable moment that God's power radiates from the preacher and is set loose to do what only the Spirit can do in the lives of our hearers. I was blessed in that Charles Crabtree allowed me to sit in on a few of his study days and watch him craft a message from beginning to end. I have yet to see a preacher who worked harder in sermon preparation than Dad. He studied, meditated, and prayed until he became so saturated with the power of truth that he became one with the message he proclaimed. People were often in awe that Dad did not use notes when he preached. He is often described as a great orator or pinnacle of Pentecostal preaching. I would agree; but Dad was an anointed communicator not because he mastered oratory but because by the time he walked into a pulpit, he had been so deep into the truth he preached that he literally became the message. And that is the difference between gifted communication and anointed preaching!



"As Spirit-filled preachers the anointing comes when we are so saturated with the power of truth and Spirit that we become one with the message we proclaim."

Finding the balance between a strong work ethic in our preaching and a healthy dependence on God is difficult but doable. Paul has shown us that preaching is like a bow—made effective by the constant tension between our labor and God's anointing. However, it is the strands of compassion, calling, balance, labor, and anointing that pull these opposing forces together and make the bow work; and through the help of God's Spirit, we hit our target!

## Making It Real

Because this white paper will be used as a resource for students in the Charles T. Crabtree School of Ministry, I have provided the following discussion questions for participants to make these truths real in their own lives. Therefore, previous graduate Nick Seders and I have created the following discussion questions for those eager to develop their preaching skills in the context of Spirit-filled ministry.

1. **Compassion.** Preaching flowing from a love for people and not just for the love of a crowd.

- Why is it so easy to ignore the personal component of preaching in favor of the public presence?
  - In what ways might an “addiction to the crowd” be detrimental both to the preacher and the rest of the congregation?
  - How can we differentiate between hardships that come from preaching boldly and those that come from a lack of personal connection with people?
  - If empathy comes hard to you, what could you do to cultivate a heart of compassion for those with whom you share the Word?
- 2. Calling.** Preaching driven by a keen awareness of God’s call to preach and proclaim.
- What distinguishes a call to preach from an affinity for preaching?
  - All believers are called to be God’s ambassadors to the world, entrusted with the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). How is a vocation of preaching both distinct from and connected to this Church-wide calling?
  - What does preaching’s role as “the now” of the gospel mean to you? Does it change the way you view this aspect of ministry?
  - How did the Lord call you to the ministry of proclamation? In what ways has it proven “indestructible, undeniable, and unavoidable”?
- 3. Balance.** Preaching that has a balance of biblical truths and practical application to all ages, demographics, and people.
- When you preach, to which do you tend to gravitate: educating the mind, targeting the heart, or activating the will? Why?
  - How can we better evaluate our preaching in terms of discipleship and maturity?
  - What is an example of exclusivity in preaching (that is, something that would make the message harder to receive for people of a certain generation, gender, ethnicity, etc.)?
  - Practically speaking, how can we identify the ways in which our preaching may lack balance in purpose, function, appeal, or biblical content?
- 4. Labor.** Preaching that is the product of discipline, deep study, and the priority of preaching.
- Brainstorm as a group and come up with a list of the five most common obstacles to investing sufficient time, energy, and prayer when writing messages.
  - Charles Crabtree guarded his study time by putting his phone in a drawer. In doing this, he not only removed the possibility of being distracted by others but also the potential of his losing his own sense of focus. What are modern examples of ways we can do the same?
  - Why do we find it so hard to carve out quiet time for meditation and study?
  - How do you make sure the application of truth is not overwhelmed by interesting facts, funny stories, or anything else?
- 5. Anointing.** Preaching that is propelled by supernatural empowerment resulting from the preacher’s being so deeply entrenched in the truth that they BECOME the message and preach with anointing.

- How might the concept of the anointing be misunderstood and misapplied in Spirit-filled churches and by a preacher?
- Why is it important to remember that the anointing is God's mighty work within a preacher and not emotions associated with things like passion, boldness, or enthusiasm?
- Share an experience you have had of God's anointing according to the explanation given above. What kind of impact did it have on you and your hearers?
- What can we do to maintain the tension between hard work and absolute dependence on God rather than ignoring one or the other?